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ABSTRACT

The curriculum delineated in this guide is aimed at multiple settings, outlining units on current affairs, globalization, religious and cultural identities, women and gender roles, social theory and social analysis, discrimination, and resistance to commodification. It is adaptable for age groups ranging from middle school through college. The guide notes that as an Islamic practice, "veiling" is a matter of degree ranging from the colorful head scarf to the black face and full body veil; veiling may have had its origin in the protection, honor, and distinction of women in Byzantine and Persian societies, and spread by conquering Muslims who assimilated the practice. It is the context that provides much of the meaning--nothing can be understood in and of itself, apart from its social context. Following a "Memoir of Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush" and an Introduction, there are four lessons: Lesson (1) "Covered Women, Uncovered Stereotypes"; Lesson (2) "Listening to "Scarves of Many Colors"; Lesson (3) "International Tribunal on Women and the Veil"; and Lesson (4) "Student as Interviewer". Each lesson presents an overview, cites materials needed, suggests a step-by-step procedure for classroom implementation, and provides student handouts. Contains an annotated list of interviews, books, magazines, and movies that deal with Muslim women and the practice of covering. (BT)

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ED 479 848

SCARVES OF MANY COLORS

Muslim Women and the Veil

A memorial curriculum in honor of the life and work of
Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush

SO 034 173

Based on an audio-tape by Joan Bohorfoush and Diana Dickerson
Written by Bill Bigelow, Sandra Childs, Norm Diamond,
Diana Dickerson and Jan Haaken

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Graphic design by Linda Hawkin Israel and Dave Johnson

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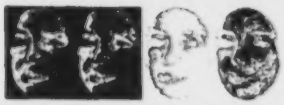

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Lesson 1: Covered Women, Uncovered Stereotypes 5

Students write and share about photographs of anonymous covered women. Students identify common themes and biases in their writing as they read about the real lives behind the images of the covered women. Students explore how ideas are shaped about people who seem different from themselves.

Lesson 2: Listening to "Scarves of Many Colors" 23

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Students role play an international forum to debate a resolution that proposes a ban on the veil as a symbol of women's oppression. In small groups, students portray six roles that represent a range of viewpoints on the practice of covering. They negotiate with other groups to support or modify the resolution or propose an alternative resolution. Students defend their viewpoints and elicit reactions during the forum, and then vote on the resolution. Students write about their roles and examine any changes in their ideas.

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An annotated list of interviews, books, magazines and movies that deal with Muslim women and the practice of covering.

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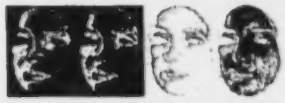
Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush



Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush (Joanie)

THE CURRICULUM, *Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil,* was developed as a tribute to Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush, a social studies teacher in Portland, Oregon who died of ovarian cancer in 1997. In addition to being a teacher, Joanie was a radio producer, cultural anthropologist, feminist, and social justice activist. She was witty, fun to be with, and extraordinarily insightful. She was also our dear friend and sister in the struggle to build a better world.

Born in Seattle, Washington, in 1951, she was a third generation Norwegian-American who grew up in a tight-knit extended family, many of whom were evangelical Christians. She was a younger sibling in a family of five children, expected by their parents to contribute to society and to have a vision of their lives that extended beyond their own immediate horizons. Joanie's interests always tended toward the cultural, as she worked to find common ground among people and amidst differences. As a college student, Joanie worked summers in the fish canneries in Alaska, where she also began to study Inuit traditions. She earned her masters degree in Cultural Anthropology from the University of Massachusetts in 1980. In 1985, she married Joe Bohorfoush and settled in Portland, where her sister Jan also lived. Joanie taught women's history classes at the college level, and United States history and global studies at the high school level. She co-produced two award-winning radio documentaries: *American Apsara: Portraits of Cambodian American Women* and *Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil.* *

Joanie's personal struggle to bridge the cultural world of her childhood and her later, more secular experiences as a social activist and anthropologist profoundly shaped her work. For her master's thesis, Joanie produced a slide show on the history of American family life in which she analyzed the images and roles of men and women against a backdrop of world events such as the Industrial Revolution and World War II. This idea of understanding people's lives in the context of the world around them shaped Joanie's later work with oral history interviews for radio documentaries. The experiences of the Cambodian refugees and the Killing Fields told the larger story of the war in Southeast Asia and its aftermath. The contrasting experiences of Muslim women in Algeria who were forced by French colonizers to remove their veils versus Iranian women who were forced by the Islamic state to cover themselves underscored the significance of the social context in terms of understanding people's lives. The stories that Joanie wove together into a radio documentary also told about ordinary people seeking to hold onto their traditions while meeting the challenges of a new, and sometimes hostile, country.

Guiding Joanie's various projects was a profound respect for other cultures and a tremendous capacity to connect with people of a wide range of backgrounds. Her interviewing skills, for which she was well known, grew out of this openness and curiosity. While she often immersed herself in books and articles to gain background in her subject matter, Joanie was primarily an oral historian. She worked and learned through relationships, which required a keen attentiveness to the social fabric of everyday life. For example, Joanie was known for her little gifts—candy, a potted plant, a funny card—that were bestowed on all sorts of occasions, including her many visits in the process of arranging an interview. Indeed, she saw the inter-

view itself as a tremendous gift—one that required an attentiveness to preserving the integrity of that individual's story. She was able to draw out the stories that defined both an individual's life and a particular era, searching out the connecting places between personal lives and transformative historical events.

Joanie was not just an exemplary interviewer. Joanie was also a radio activist. She loved the accessibility of radio, and she used it skillfully to give voice to points of view and people who otherwise would not be heard. She produced pieces featuring demonstrators against the United States bombing of Iraq, a memorial to Ben Linder, the Abraham Lincoln International Brigade, and scores of people from all walks of life who were resisting injustice in some way. Joanie put considerable effort into producing each program, including conducting the interviews, selecting appropriate music, writing and recording an introduction and conclusion, editing a finished piece, and delivering it to KBOO, Portland's community radio station, to be aired on the Old Mole Variety Hour, a weekly left perspective radio show. Joanie collaborated on producing as many as four programs per month before she got sick, and then one or two programs per month after she got sick.

Despite her commitment and her belief in herself, things did not always go well for Joanie. She became a teacher because she wanted to make a difference in the world, but her first teaching job was at a conservative, affluent suburban high school. She soon found herself at odds with the administration over her teaching style and content. After three difficult years, Joanie was fired from the school. She appealed the decision to the school board, but despite moving testimony from students, colleagues and university teacher-educators at a public hearing, board members voted in favor of the school administration. Two weeks later, Joanie learned that she had ovarian cancer.

Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil was the last feature-length radio program Joanie produced. While she worked on the piece, Joanie endured multiple surgeries, chemotherapy, a bone marrow transplant, and radiation. She wore head scarves herself through much of the project because she had lost her hair to the treatments. Never one to give up, she saw the project through to completion and broadcast. Two weeks after Joanie died in 1997, the documentary received the Clarion Award from the Association for Women in Communications.

This curriculum was developed by Joanie's friends and family as a tribute to her life and work. In that spirit, we invite you to read the Introduction to gain insight into the philosophy of social justice and commitment on which the curriculum is based.

* Both documentaries were co-produced with Diana Dickerson, one of the authors of the curriculum. The projects received funding from the Oregon Council for the Humanities, and *American Apsara* received additional funding from the Washington Commission for the Humanities.

Introduction

THE RADIO TAPE *Scarves of Many Colors* was Joan Bohorfoush's final public project. Work on it sustained her as she battled cancer. In an extraordinary tribute after she died, friends and family gathered to think of an appropriate memorial. Joanie had been a high school teacher as well as radio activist. This curriculum, also called *Scarves of Many Colors*, is one outcome.

Putting it together over more than two years has been a labor of love. Joanie was a wonderful person, gifted and giving in her relationships as in many other ways. Creating the curriculum was an opportunity to introduce her work to students and teachers as well as work in a thoughtful and sustained way with colleagues. The challenge was to draw on the tape and pursue its many leads into some of the most important questions we face about the nature of our society and the kind of society we'd like to have. We've tried to do so in the spirit of Joanie's own teaching, with its emphasis on critical student participation.

We've aimed this curriculum at multiple settings. It fits in units on current affairs, globalization, religious and cultural identities, women and gender roles, social theory and social analysis, discrimination, and resistance to commodification. It is adaptable for age groups ranging from middle school through college.

What comes to mind when you hear the words "veiled woman?" Here's what Joanie had to say:

> As an Islamic practice, veiling is known by several names: the hijab, the burqa and the chador. Veiling is a matter of degree ranging from the colorful head scarf to the black face and full body veil. The custom may have had its origin in the protection, honor and distinction of women in Byzantine and Persian societies, and spread by conquering Muslims who assimilated the practice. It is a sign which tells the public, especially the male public, that women are respectable and are not to be harassed. It is also an affirmation of identity in an increasingly Westernized world. From Morocco to Malaysia to the US, it has different meanings.

One of the keys to that statement is in the last sentence. The veil means something utterly different when women are forced to wear it, as by the Taliban in contemporary Afghanistan, from a situation where it is freely adopted as an expression of cultural identity. A striking example, one of many possible, would be revolutionary Algeria. In the independence struggle against France, women returned to the veil as an act of resistance against colonial masters. For some, it was even a way to smuggle guns under their clothes. Yet another meaning occurs in our own society. Here, some women put on the veil, even convert to Islam, in part to reject the sexual objectification that is so integral to our consumer culture.

It is the context that provides much of the meaning. Something that seems the same has a very different significance in different social settings or different historical periods. This is a basic principle in analyzing any social phenomenon: Nothing can be understood in and of itself, apart from its social context. Context matters.

We used the words "freely adopted" in contrasting voluntary with forced veiling. But can anything be said to be "free" when it is subject to social influences and pressures? What if you were an Algerian woman during the fight for independence, and women all around you were adopting the veil? There are important senses in which the choice would still be yours, but the notion of "freedom" clearly requires a nuanced discussion.

And that's precisely the point made by many of the women in our own society who decide to cover. What kind of freedom is it, they say, that defines itself mainly in terms of consumer goods? Aren't there limits to our own freedom when women are subject to harassment and surrounded by pressures to feel bad about themselves and therefore seek fulfillment through consumption? This is a dimension of freedom that may seem far removed from the question of participation in public political life. But in both dimensions, awareness of the influences operating on us and the ability to genuinely decide on issues that affect us are fundamental.

The same issue comes alive in our classrooms when students resist thinking about how their attitudes and values are culturally influenced. For example, they will insist that advertising doesn't affect them and neither does playing video games: their ideas are simply their own. This resistance to questioning the social origin of their thinking comes from living in a society that insists we are all free individuals, freely choosing our own ideas. We want our students to exercise the freedom they do have to reflect on and critique ideas, but we want them to consider where those ideas come from to begin with.

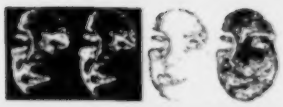
Thus the beginning lesson in this curriculum — an activity asking students to imagine the lives of "covered" Islamic women in photographs — allows students to confront their stereotypes. Most students suppose that the women are oppressed, forced to cover, and live in slave-like conditions. As they discover, this is far from the truth. Through discussion, students try to account for the chasm between their uniformly bleak first impressions and the real world.

The lessons draw on other cultures and cultural practices to explore these issues of freedom and social analysis. Our experience with the activities included here is that non-Islamic students begin to appreciate the circumstances and choices of people who at first glance may seem different, even bizarre. This awareness is a vital part of a critical multiculturalism that appreciates cultural differences, critiques social inequities, and gets beyond merely tolerating each other to seek a common ground on which diverse groups can work together for needed change.

The Muslim world in particular is much in the news. As we write this, there is a rebellion in Iran; the Taliban in Afghanistan is loosening restrictions on women in response to international pressure; Arab-Israeli peace talks are starting up again; Islamic groups struggle with the military for control of the Algerian state. In each of these, the situation of women or their activities is key.

Prominent political scientists tell us that the "fault lines" of the New World Order no longer run between East and West but are now between "civilizations." This formulation may be just a convenient way to ignore the North-South divide, the tension between the wealthier and the very poor nations. In what they mean by a "civilization," Islam figures prominently. Arabs have replaced communists as the stereotype du jour, as the (terrorist) scapegoat in media fantasies.

Elites thrive on the divisions of those beneath them. Stereotypes flourish among the divisions. We intend *Scarves of Many Colors* the same way Joanie did: as a way of bringing people together and as a contribution to change how some of the next generation understand themselves, their world and their possibilities.



LESSON #1

"Covered" Women, Uncovered Stereotypes

LESSONS one and two introduce the range of concepts and concerns students will encounter in *Scarves of Many Colors* by exploring two large sets of issues: stereotypes about covered women and therefore stereotypes in general, and some of the complexities, nuances and different possible meanings of "freedom."

We begin with a kind of Rorschach test: students encounter images of "covered" Islamic women and, through writing interior monologues, discover the impressions they might already hold of women who wear the "hijab." Through the accompanying audio tape, students then hear the real voices of a number of women who challenge some of the most common stereotypes. With their own initial impressions shaken up — or perhaps not — students try to figure out why they held the impressions they did: where the images come from and why oversimplifications occur.

Raising these questions by using the award-winning radio tape *Scarves of Many Colors* lets students hear and discuss one model of how harmful stereotypes may be challenged. Through further discussion, students reflect on how notions of freedom, when assumed and not critically examined, can be merely a way of upholding what is familiar and condemning what is not. They draw on the headscarf to think more deeply about associated issues of empowerment, resistance, and coercion. One special caution comes out of our experience. You may have students in class who cover. It is important to talk with them ahead of time, both to not put them on the spot and to give them the option to participate or lead. Resist any temptation to make these students "native informants." As with members of any other group, be careful not to presume that they are expert or can speak for an entire group that shares their practice. We've been pleasantly surprised. One student, after denying she had any special understanding or ability to lead a discussion, discovered that she indeed had knowledge and ended up playing an active role.

Materials needed:

1. Copies of photos of "covered" women, found here on pages 9–19. (Note: It's important that these be reproduced as clearly as possible. As an alternative, you might consider cutting them out of this teaching guide and mounting them on posterboard to be displayed throughout the classroom.)
2. Copies of Student Handout "The Life Behind the Image."
3. Copies of Student Handout "The (Reral) Lives Behind the Image."

A Note on Stereotypes

DRAWING: JOAN BOHORFOUSH

As they develop some critical awareness about stereotyping, students sometimes come to the conclusion that it is wrong to put people into categories. As this issue emerges in the classroom, we encourage you to engage students in thinking about when categories are useful and when they are destructive. What is the difference between classifying, grouping, and generalizing — concepts vital for organizing experience and for functioning in the world — and stereotyping? A stereotype is a false generalization about an individual or group, even though many stereotypes have some basis in reality. It involves drawing a conclusion that has the effect of creating social distance and closing down the process of learning about others. But there is also a political dimension to this form of categorizing. Stereotyping robs individuals and groups of complexity, reducing them to the crude dimensions of a "type." This is particularly destructive when the individual or group has a history of being defined in narrow or negative ways by the dominant group. Even "positive" stereotypes can be oppressive. For example, women and people of color are often viewed as more emotional, sensual, and spiritual than are white males. While these may be positive characteristics, they are also used to place women and people of color in a position closer to "nature" and thus as less culturally "advanced" than white males. Groups that have been stereotyped may make new uses of these characteristics in the process of redefining themselves, just as they may struggle to break free from older definitions altogether.

Suggested Procedure:

1. On pages 9–19, there are six numbered photographs of "covered" women. Make either xeroxed copies of these or cut them out of this teaching guide. If you cut them out, post them around the classroom, marked one through six.

2. Ask students to count off one through six. Have students form small groups around the classroom. If you made copies of the photos, distribute at least one different image to each group.

3. Tell students that they will be responsible for writing about the photograph that corresponds to their number. Distribute Student Handout "The Life Behind the Image" to each student, which contains the following instructions:

   > Write about the life of the woman portrayed in your photograph. Do this as a brief story or biography, as an interior monologue or even as a poem. Try to cover the following questions: Where does this woman live? Why does she cover? When does she cover? What religion is she? What are her relationships like with other women, with men, with her family? Is she married? If so, what is her relationship like with her spouse? What work does she do? How is she treated because of her dress? Is she "free"? Is she "equal"?

If you posted the photos around the classroom, give students a few minutes to get up and look at them before they write. Allow only a few minutes to complete the writing. This is aimed to collect first impressions. Also, it's not a group activity, so they should complete these without discussing their thoughts with one another.

In our experience, students choose many creative ways to get into their character, but no matter how well written, they are generally filled with stereotypes. Here's one written by a young woman, an 11th grader:

She Is A Slave

This woman will remain nameless because she is married and is now a slave to her spouse. "Woman," as we will call her, is silent in her steps and invisible in her movements. She is a slave. A slave to her spouse. An order to cook, an order to clean, an order to farm, an order to shop for food. All she hears are orders.

To her, life is normal. She has no dislikes about her life because this is all she has known. She is a slave.

To not cover up is wrongdoing. She must, so others know she is married and cannot look at her flesh.

She is a slave.
To be in darkness.
To be in shame
To be a woman
She is a slave

(This was written about photo #5, Fatimah Hashemi, the daughter of the former president of Iran, who directs an Iranian women's organization.)

4. Students should read their writings to each other. With their groups, ask them to:
   - look for and to list similarities and themes that recur in their pieces;
   - write down anything that comes up more than once;
   - choose one or two of the pieces to read to the whole class.

5. Ask each group to present and share its list of themes that recurred in their writings. With the class, build a list of commonalties from reading the "collective text" of the different groups. Write these on the board or overhead. Here's the list that one of us generated with a recent class of 11th grade Global Studies students:

isolation
ostracized
alone
uncomfortable
hot
devoted
spiritual
works at home
no job
goes to marketplace
married
mothers
covering required by law or religion
dependent
servant
not equal/more rights needed
no color
scared
hiding
insecure
sad
few women friends
man in charge
man as center
husband "owns" her
humility/lowered gaze
strict upbringing
death
loss
gloom

6. The class discusses:
   - Does anyone know the religion of all the women in the photos? [It may be helpful later to discuss with students the basic principles of Islam, or better, to invite a guest speaker from the Islamic community. See Further Resources, page 51.]
   - Where do our ideas about covered women come from?
   - Where have you seen women like this?
   - In our writings, did we see these women as less "free" than non-Islamic women? Free to do what; free to be what or whom; free from what?
   - What questions are we left with about the veil? (List these.)

7. Distribute copies of the Student Handout on page 22, the brief descriptions of the women portrayed in the photographs. Ask students to discuss or write about how their stories were similar to or different from the real life stories of the women: Were you surprised by anything in these stories? If so, why? What might explain the difference in your account as compared to the women's actual stories?

This is an important piece of the lesson, where students begin to recognize the stereotypes they carry around about Islamic women who cover. This activity leaves students open to question how they could have been so ill-informed, and why the mis-information would be so similar.

One final note on this lesson: We are aware that the covered women in the photos don't represent the geographic or racial diversity of the Muslim world. For example, none of the women is from Indonesia, the most populous predominantly Islamic country, or from the African Muslim world. When we shared a draft of this curriculum with Audrey Shabbas, director of Arab World and Islamic Resources, she noted that this omission would likely influence students' written responses. Shabbas said that she frequently encounters literature that includes critical remarks about "white" Islamic women who cover — e.g., "Islam requires women to cover," in a book on growing up in Morocco — but is silent about Indonesian or sub-Saharan African women who cover. White Westerners often assume that women of color are not "like us," she theorized. They expect them to be more "exotic," and hence fail to comment on these women's headscarves. This is exactly the reaction one of us found in her classroom when she included a photo of an Indonesian woman in this lesson — students' speculative writings about this woman were not as harshly stereotypical as were their writings about the other "white" Islamic women. Given that an important aim of the lesson is to surface stereotypes, we elected not to diversify the photos. Nonetheless, using other photos is an option you might select.

See the *National Geographic's* searchable website, www.nationalgeographic.com, for downloadable images.

Photograph 1

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Photograph 2

Photograph 3

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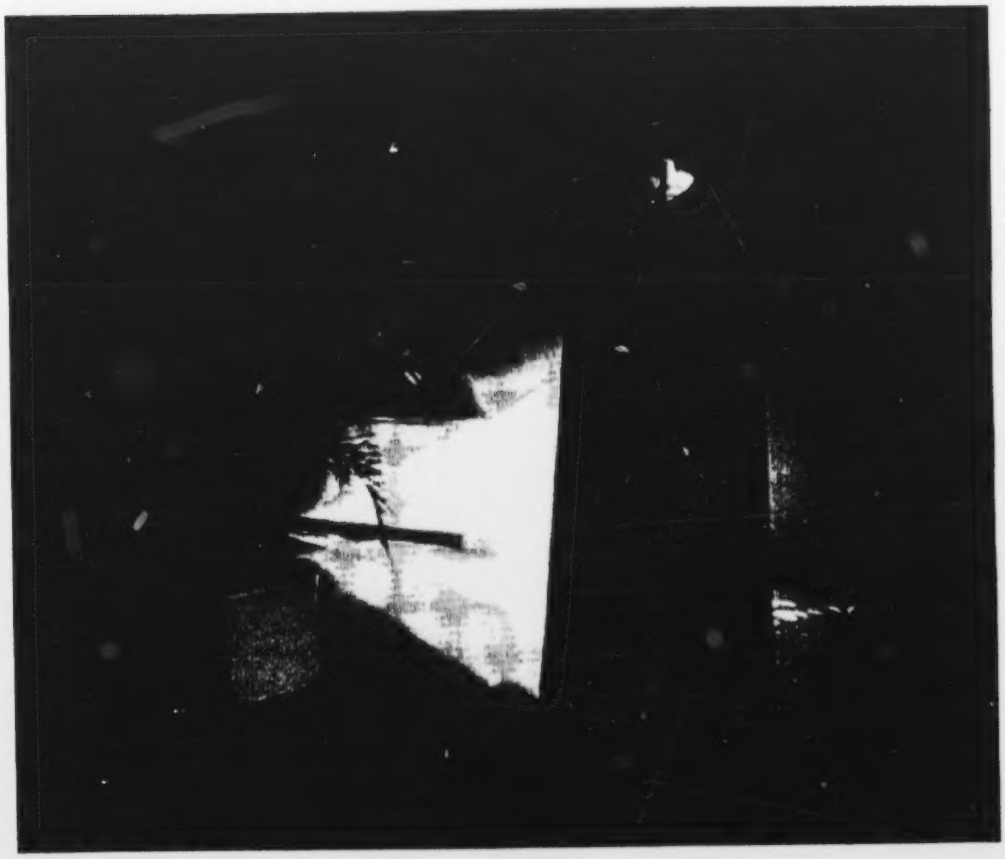
Photograph 4

Photograph 5



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Photograph 6

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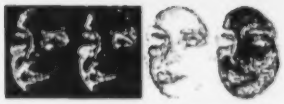


The Life Behind the Image

WRITE ABOUT THE LIFE of the woman portrayed in your photograph. Do this as a brief story or biography, as an interior monologue or even as a poem. Try to cover the following questions: Where does this woman live? Why does she cover? When does she cover? What religion is she? What are her relationships like with other women, with men, with her family? Is she married? If so, what is her relationship like with her spouse? What work does she do? How is she treated because of her dress? Is she "free"? Is she "equal"?

The (Real) Lives Behind the Image

1. **Sana Rami Alawani** is pictured here with her son, Yasseen. She is a 24 year old Palestinian who lives in Jerusalem. She is a homemaker who has attended university. She chose to interrupt her education to raise her children, but is planning to resume her studies later. She is active in causes for Palestinian rights. She chose her own husband.

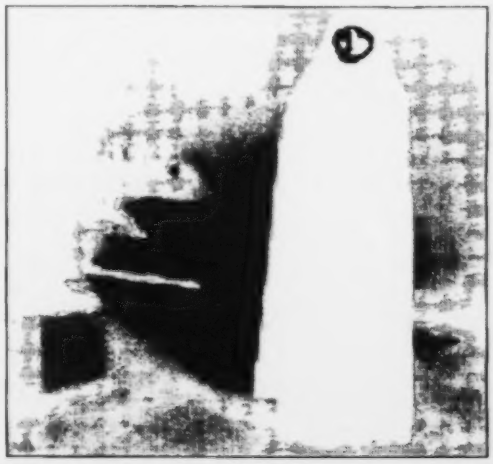
2. **and 3.** are of the same woman: **Aynur Demirel** is a 24 year old 5th year medical student who lives in Turkey. She is the daughter of a Black Sea coal miner and very much wants to be a doctor. However, in Turkey no woman involved in a public institution (like a medical school) is allowed to wear traditional Islamic headcovering. So Demirel is not being allowed to take her medical exams unless she removes her headscarf. In the photograph, she is protesting the headscarf ban, because wearing the covering is an expression of her Muslim faith.

4. **Marzieh Vahid Dastjerdi** is a 37 year old surgeon, obstetrician, and member of Parliament in Iran. She is pictured here with her two daughters who attend school. She is a strong believer in "Islamic dress" and a strong advocate for women's rights in Iran. She is working to allow women to be judges, for the creation of more shelters for battered women, and for laws forbidding forced marriages.

5. **Fatimah Hashemi** is the 36 year old daughter of the former president of Iran. She runs a women's organization associated with the Foreign Ministry. Her group organizes disease prevention classes and runs a modern hospital. Her sister is a vocal member of Parliament who is working to create equality in labor laws and get back wages for housework for women in divorce proceedings. Underneath the chador (the Islamic cloak shown in the picture) she is wearing an elegant dress, fancy earrings and has her hair done. She reveals this high class fashion at a variety of women's gatherings.

6. **Benazir Bhutto** attended Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She was elected Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988 and is still deeply involved in Pakistani politics. Pakistan is 97% Muslim. In office, however, Bhutto opposed the imposition of strict Islamic law. She was the first woman elected to lead a primarily Muslim country. (By contrast, over ten years later, no woman has been elected president or even vice-president of the United States of America. Other Islamic women heads of state have included Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh), Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh), Tansu Ciller (Turkey); and Megawati Sukarnoputri is the most prominent opposition leader in Indonesia.)

Listening to "Scarves of Many Colors"



Suggested Procedure:

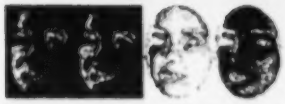
1. Introduce the audiotape, *Scarves of Many Colors.* [See the brief biography of Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush, the tape's co-producer and the person who conducts the interviews, at the beginning of this booklet.] Ask students to think about the following questions as they listen to the first part of the tape:
   - According to the tape, what are some of the stereotypes of Islamic women that people have in this country?
   - Looking back over the writing you did based on the pictures of covered women, and the lists we made as a class, which of these stereotypes can you find?
2. Play the tape for students. Turn it off after the African American woman, Marion Dawan, says, "It's not so much for women like us," which is followed by a musical break.
3. After playing part one of the tape, discuss the above questions. Other possible questions for discussion and/or writing include:
   - What is some evidence from the tape that these stereotypes are incorrect?
   - [If you haven't discussed yet:] Why do you think people have these stereotypes? Where do they come from?
   - How do these stereotypes affect people's behavior toward Muslims?
   - How do the stereotypes affect Muslim women?
   - The tape suggests that non-Islamic Americans have a hard time accepting head covering or veiling by Muslim women. Do you agree? If so, why do you think that's true?
   - How have Muslim women fought against discrimination based on their choice of dress?
   - Some Muslim women consider covering in the United States to be a "political" statement. What does that mean?
   - What kind of "freedoms" do women who cover have? Do they have freedoms that other women lack?
   - If some women choose to cover themselves to prevent being seen as sexual objects by men, does this let men off the hook? Isn't it really the men's problem, not the women's?
   - In what ways could covering be seen as a "symbol of respect," as one woman says in the tape?
   - One woman in the tape defends the wearing of the hijab by saying, "In essence, it's saying: 'I'm not here to be exploited.'" What does it mean for a woman to be "exploited"? How does the hijab free women from exploitation? Are there ways that non-Muslim women resist being exploited? To the young women in the class: Are there ways that you resist being exploited?

- What might covering represent to Muslim women here in the United States?
- How do you think Islamic women in the United States would react to the circumstances in some countries where the covering of women is the official policy of the government?

4. Explain that the second part of the tape deals with the experience of Muslim women in countries in the Middle East. As they listen, ask them to list all the reasons that Islamic women cover themselves. They should also list the different countries mentioned. Play the tape.

5. After the tape, together, list on the board or overhead the reasons for covering. Additional questions for discussion:
   - What happened to women in Iran who refused to cover themselves?
   - Why would a government begin a policy of forced covering?
   - How did women in Iran resist forced covering?
   - How did (and do) some women in the Middle East see covering as resistance to oppression?
   - Why are Palestinian women increasingly choosing to cover?
   - One woman in the tape says that the "veil is like a wall around you." Why would anyone choose to put a wall around herself?
   - One woman says that "the issue is not the veil, the issue is access to public space." What does she mean? Do you agree?
   - How is the issue of the veil really about "how we want this little planet to be"?
   - In what way is covering a "card of empowerment," as one of the women in the tape suggests? What is meant by "card of empowerment"? How are women's choices of dress in this society "cards of empowerment"? Can choices of dress be both empowering and disempowering? What about students at this school; does the way people dress have anything to do with gaining more power? What kind of power?
   - How do you think you would be treated by people at this school if you were covered? How would it change your life?
   - How would you respond if there were a covered student in our class? Would you ignore this fact, ask her about why she covers....? And why would you respond this way?

6. Possible follow-up activities. Students might:
   - Write about how their attitudes changed as a result of these activities.
   - Write poetry based on one or more of the women in the tape, "stealing" language from the tape — e.g., "bundles of black" — or write a dialogue poem between a woman who covers and one who doesn't; between a woman who covers and a man.
   - Work on follow-up projects: research images of women in the media, in ads on TV or in magazines. They might focus especially on the idea of women's "freedom," the construction of "freedom" by media. How does this affect women? Who benefits, who suffers? [Some teachers have followed this unit (or preceded it) by looking at images of women in advertising. See the excellent videos, *Still Killing Us Softly* and *The Ad and the Ego.*]
   - Conduct oral histories by interviewing women in their families on the changing role of women, etc.
   - Research web sites.



LESSON #3

International Tribunal on Women and the Veil

BY NOW STUDENTS HAVE HEARD, discussed, and written about the tape, *Scarves of Many Colors: Muslim Women and the Veil.* They have listened to a variety of voices. In this role play they will have a chance to become the voices.

The media often portray the veil as a symbol of opposites. In equating the veil with "backwardness," it is used as an affirmation of non-Islamic Western women's independence, individuality, and "freedom." At the same time it is presented as an oppressive cultural relic used to silence, marginalize, and enslave Islamic women. The tape introduced students to some of the complexities of covering — that they need to view it in terms of specific historical, cultural, and social contexts. It has been used as a symbol of devotion. It has been used as a part of the Middle East's resistance to Western domination. It has been used by women to defend themselves against objectification. But it has also been used as a tool of oppression imposed by law and custom; it has become a weapon in the hands of those who would create a kind of gender apartheid in their societies. Because of the complex and often contradictory shades of meaning, it is not enough for students to listen to the dialogue. Now they must participate in it.

In this role play, students have the opportunity to represent one of six perspectives: 1. an Egyptian woman choosing to cover; 2. an Afghani woman who strongly opposes forced covering; 3. an Afghani woman required by law to cover but supportive of this law; 4. a Turkish woman supportive of her country's anti-veiling laws; 5. an American woman against the practice of covering; 6. an American woman who chooses to cover. By becoming one of these characters and by debating with the others, students will begin to peel away the stereotypes to explore the diversity of Islamic women's lives and the role played by covering in different societies.

A REAL-LIFE TRIBUNAL that would consider banning women from dressing a particular way would be repugnant to many of us, whether it adopted the ban or not. Such a tribunal would raise human rights questions that have particular implications for minority groups within a society. You may want to introduce the role play by explaining to students that a classroom permits us to experience a range of unreal or extreme situations as a way of addressing real-life issues. In our experience, the Tribunal role play effectively does just that.

Materials Needed:

1. Copies of the six roles — enough for each student to have one role.

2. Placards, marking pens.

Suggested Procedure:

1. Write the names of all the role play groups on the board or overhead:
   - Azza, from Afghanistan
   - Maureen, from the United States
   - Karen, from the United States
   - Zahira, from Afghanistan
   - Fairuz, from Egypt
   - Kemi, from Turkey

Describe the role play to students. (These instructions are repeated on the student handout, *International Tribunal on Women and the Veil: Role Play Instructions,* on the back of each role): Each of them will represent a group that has been invited to an international forum on "Women and the Veil." Delegates to the forum — from all over the world — will debate the following resolution:

> *Whereas the veil is a symbol of women's oppression; and*
>
> *Whereas women should not celebrate or promote their oppression by veiling or covering themselves; therefore,*
>
> *Be it resolved that the veil should be banned in all societies.*

Tell them that they will read their roles carefully, decide whether or not they agree with the resolution, and modify or re-write it based on their group's perspective. Tell them that before the forum convenes, you will give each group an opportunity to meet and negotiate with other groups.

2. Have students count off into six groups. Students should form their groups around the classroom.

3. Distribute one set of roles to each group. (Every person in a group receives the same role.) Students should carefully read these and complete the four instructions on each role. Circulate among the groups to answer questions and observe their discussions about the resolution and their proposed alternatives.

   Note: Each group is asked to complete the following in writing:

   1. Restate what the veil means to you. Tell in detail what experiences you've had that have shaped your attitudes about the veil.

2. Do you agree with the resolution? Why or why not?
3. List at least four points in support of your position on the resolution.
4. Propose an alternative resolution or modify the resolution so it represents your position.

   Also distribute to each group a placard and a marker so students can display the name of their group.

4. After they have finished reading and discussing their role and completing the four above tasks, tell students that to prepare for the forum, they'll now have a chance to talk with the other groups. They should discuss the issues with others and try to combine resolutions, where possible. Note: Since the students do not see the other role descriptions it is only during the negotiations and presentations that other groups hear critical pieces of information. As students prepare for the conference it is essential to check in with the groups regularly. Find out what their key points are and guide them toward using important information from the role description to strengthen their arguments.

   Each group should select half its members to be "ambassadors" to other groups. (Ambassadors will travel from group to group as they attempt to elicit support for their resolutions and build alliances. They may not meet with other ambassadors because the people remaining in groups would have no one to talk with.)

5. Monitor this negotiating segment of the role play. Give students ample opportunity to talk with each other about their resolutions — perhaps 20 minutes to a half hour depending on the class. Have them return to their own groups when you call time.

6. In their small groups, instruct students to prepare their presentation to the Forum. Remind them that their presentations must cover all four questions included on their role sheet.

   Encourage students to divide their presentations so that every student in the group has a chance to participate.

7. Forum: Students should sit with their group in a large circle — placards visible. The teacher chairs the session. Each group should make its presentation. Afterwards, other groups are free to comment, critique and question the group that just presented. Encourage groups to respond to each other's presentation and ask questions so that the meeting is not merely a series of reports. (Note: Although most groups will suggest an alternative resolution, until the main resolution is defeated, it is the only one on the floor.)

   After all groups have presented, call for a vote on the original resolution. If it feels like its merits have not been fully debated, allow more discussion, otherwise go straight to a vote. If the resolution is defeated, as is likely, allow students to propose an alternative, and continue the forum.

At the completion of the Forum, ask students to write about the role play before discussing. You might ask them to write about the same questions they responded to in their group, except this time from their actual, personal, point of view, instead of from their character's. Here are some other questions that we've used:

1. In your role, write a reaction to the "International Tribunal on Women and the Veil." Was the outcome satisfactory? Refer to points that other people raised during the discussion and in the small group negotiation sessions.
2. As yourself: How do you think the class did? Whose contribution in the role play were you impressed by and why?
3. Talk about your participation: Were you prepared? Was your group prepared? Did you understand your character's perspective? How were you involved in the role play?
4. From the stereotype activity with the covered women photos, the *Scarves of Many Colors* radio documentary, and the role play, describe how covering can be either liberating or oppressive, depending on the circumstances.
5. How did the activities influence or change your ideas about covering?

Use their writing as the basis for class discussion.

PHOTO COURTESY OF PHOTOFEST

Gillo Pontecorvo prepares a crowd scene for The Battle of Algiers.

STUDENT HANDOUT

Azza: from Afghanistan

MY NAME IS AZZA. I am from Afghanistan. We have known war and chaos for a long time. First the Soviets invaded in 1979, and then the Mujahadeen fought to take back the country. The Soviets left in 1989, but then the Mujahadeen began behaving like lawless thugs, robbing and raping. The Taliban came and put a stop to that. At first, I thought the Taliban were saviors. It's true that sometimes they took quite brutal steps to bring peace, but I could see no other alternative. They brought order to the country.

But it has been a terrible kind of order. The Taliban has waged war against women.

I used to be a student. I dreamt of being a doctor or an engineer. Perhaps my family could not have afforded to send me to school — my father is a poorly-paid janitor in a hospital — but I had my dreams. Now the Taliban has abolished all dreams for women. You will not believe the world that they have created, but I will tell you anyway.

Since 1996 all women must wear the *burqa* to cover our entire body. I remember the day shortly after the Taliban had taken power, when a radio bulletin announced the celebration of the public beating of 250 women in a single day for not observing the dress code. Women are beaten for as little as not wearing the thick mesh covering over their eyes. A mob beat to death one woman merely because she exposed her bare arm from a car window. Another was stoned to death for attempting to leave the country with a man who was not her relative.

No woman is allowed to go out in public without a male relative. All professional women — doctors, professors, lawyers, artists, writers — have been forced to quit their jobs. They must stay in their homes at all times. There is no public life for women. Women without husbands or male relatives starve to death or beg on the street. Because women are forbidden to show their bodies to men other than their husbands and because no women may practice medicine, women remain untreated and suffer and die. Prenatal care is no longer a real option and death from childbirth has risen.

I feel utterly hopeless and am terribly depressed. I have had friends who committed suicide because of their depression. I suspect that there are many, but the newspapers would never print such a thing. My family has had to paint the windows of our house so that I cannot be seen by outsiders. I must wear silent shoes so that I may not be heard. It is as if a large part of my country has gone crazy.

My father, who is a kind man and believes in rights for women, has told me horrible things about what goes on in the hospital where he works. He said that there are rooms full of women who lie day after day on their beds, wrapped in their *burqas*, unwilling to speak, eat or do anything. They slowly waste away. He has seen women crouching in the corners, constantly rocking or crying.

I am a Muslim. I am not against the *burqa* for those who wish it. I myself wore "modest dress and a head covering." But it was my choice. And I could still go to school and appear in public and I was treated as a human being. I understand that many in Afghanistan, even some women, ferociously embrace tradition to halt the arrival of the corrupting influences of Western culture — a culture that seems to believe

that everything and everyone can be bought and sold. I, too, am offended by the corruption and commercialism brought by American and European influences.

Some in the Taliban say that people in the West should not criticize the restrictions on women because it is "our" culture. But it is not my culture. Perhaps there are some women in the villages who support the changes brought by the Taliban. But Afghanistan is a diverse society, like so many others in the world. That is why women must be allowed to choose in what way they will express their devotion to Islam. That is why it is not a matter of culture to be forced to wear the *burqa* and be forced to live as 2nd, no, 3rd class citizens. Even dogs have more rights than women now. People in the West need to speak out against the mistreatment of women in my country — including the forced wearing of the *burqa*.

International Tribunal
on Women and the Veil: Role Play Instructions

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Read your role carefully, decide whether or not you agree with the resolution, and modify or re-write it based on your group's perspective. Before the forum convenes, each group will have an opportunity to meet and negotiate with other groups.

In your group, complete the following in writing:

1. Restate what the veil means to you. Tell in detail what experiences you've had that have shaped your attitudes about the veil.
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4. Propose an alternative resolution or modify the resolution so it represents your position.

Maureen: from the United States

HOW RIDICULOUS: to blame the hijab for women's oppression. To me, the hijab is not the cause of oppression, but protection from it.

My name is Maureen. I grew up in a typical middle class suburb of a large American city. As a little girl, I watched TV commercial upon TV commercial showing beautiful, thin, happy models. In fact, the ads taught me that to be happy I had to be "pretty" and I had to be skinny. At the same time, little boys were learning that it was OK to judge girls on how well we matched the feminine advertising image. All my friends judged themselves on how well they lived up to the advertising ideal — even though they may not have known they were doing that at the time. My mother told me how pretty I was, but I felt that I was ugly. At night sometimes I would flip through the pages of *Seventeen* magazine and wish that I looked like those girls.

Lots of times I wore baggy sweatshirts or overalls to school, trying to hide my body, to keep it away from the judging eyes of the boys and even the other girls. I wished that I could have built a box around me to keep other people from looking critically at my body. So often, I felt self-conscious sitting in class, and I know now that the self-consciousness distracted me from concentrating on my schoolwork. I tried diet after diet, and grew up not liking myself very much.

Looking back on those years I realize that I was fine — it was the society that was messed up. There was a whole industry aimed at teaching young women insecurity and self-contempt. Contented women made bad customers. Contented women didn't buy all the crap that advertisers told them they "needed" to live up to the pretty/skinny/smiling ideal — the soaps, the sprays, the creams, the make-up, the fashions.

Many things attracted me to Islam — and that's a long story — but one feature that I especially appreciated was the religion's respect for women. In Islam, women were not sex-objects to be ogled; their bodies were not to be put on display for male approval or rejection. The hijab was a concrete statement that told people: women's bodies are sacred. The Qur'an says that women "should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands" or to close male relatives or children. Islam offered me a freedom that secular America did not. It allowed me to stop feeling inferior, to stop competing with other women, and to focus on intellectual and spiritual matters.

A newspaper recently quoted one of my friends who explained, "Wearing the hijab is saying I should be valued for my capabilities and the person that I am. I was trying to explain this to a 10-year old Boy Scout who is not a Muslim, and he said, 'Oh, so you don't want people to say, "Yo! Mama!" when you go out.' And I told him, 'That's it exactly.' "

So I am especially bitter when people in Western countries say how "backward" Islam is because women are covered, how oppressed Islamic women are. In my eyes, nothing could be further from the truth. The hijab liberates women. It says to society, "Keep your eyes off my body — women are not things, we are human beings." What should be condemned is not the hijab or Islam, but the whole social system that tries to make women feel self contempt and competitive with one another, that judges us on how we look, that trains men to rate women based on appearance, that turns people into objects, and that allows corporations to benefit from this whole process. No, the hijab does not oppress women — it frees us.

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Karen: From the United States

MY NAME IS KAREN. I am a 32 year old social worker. I live in Akron, Ohio. I work with children and women from abusive homes. In my job, I have seen a lot of anger directed at women. I have seen that many men are threatened by women who speak out. I have seen strong women drained of their power, forced to be what men want them to be. I have worked as an advocate for women and women's rights since I was in college. I have devoted my life to helping women gain equal status. This is why I must speak out against the wearing of the veil by Muslim women.

I am against veiling for three reasons. The first has to do with how it has been used to silence and segregate women from society. The second has to do with how women are perceived when wearing the veil. The third has to do with the importance of self expression through the body and clothing.

I understand that not all Muslim women have always been made to wear the veil. And I understand that "veiling" does not always mean full covering of the face and body. But in some countries, women are required to completely cover themselves. In many of these countries women are also denied the rights and privileges that men have. In Saudi Arabia it is illegal for a woman to drive. In Kuwait, women cannot vote. In Afghanistan, many cannot work. The veil symbolizes restrictions for women. Even if that was not the original intention of the Qur'an, this is how it has been used and interpreted: to keep women out of public life. And when women are excluded from participating in society, they become victims of it. I know some will say, "It is for a woman's protection that she must be veiled." But why should a woman give up the right to wear what she wants just to avoid tempting a man? Why not put the burden on the man to control himself?

I know many say it is their choice to wear the veil. But what does free "choice" mean in cultures that have traditionally devalued women's minds and voices? Aren't they just going along with what their religion has told them to do? Is this really choice? Even assuming it truly is their choice, the veil now symbolizes repression, exclusion, and silence. To wear the veil is to offer yourself up as a second class citizen. To wear the veil is to go along with the oppression of your sisters who might not have the choice.

Even assuming the veil isn't used to silence women in Middle Eastern Muslim countries, that is how it is perceived by the rest of the world. Even if the woman under the veil is strong and intelligent, her value is immediately rejected. She will not be invited to participate in any dialogue or action because the veil tells us, "Leave me alone. Don't touch me. I am separate from the rest of you." The veil sends us the signal that she shouldn't mingle; and in an effort not to trespass, we avoid these women. If you wear the veil, you are telling us to exclude you.

The last reason I am against veiling is admittedly a viewpoint that comes from cultural bias. I think the body and the self are connected. Self expression includes how you dress and wear your hair. The freedom that I enjoy as an American woman is the freedom I want for all women. I can be anything I want. I can look anyway I want. To restrict my clothing is to restrict me. In an abusive relationship the male partner often requires his wife or girlfriend to avoid any revealing clothing because he is suspicious and jealous.

An early sign that you are with a potentially abusive partner is that he wants to control what you wear. Later he will control where you go, who you talk to, and finally whether you will live or die. For anyone or any institution — be it a boyfriend or religion, a culture, or a country — to tell a grown woman how to dress is a violation of her rights, a violation of her voice, a violation of her very soul. The veil should be banned because it denies women their freedom.

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Zahira: from Afghanistan

MY NAME IS ZAHIRA. I am a 25 year old Muslim woman from Afghanistan. I am in training to be a doctor, but that is on hold once again. My country has suffered much. When the Russians invaded we thought our lives were over. But eventually they left. In the space created by their leaving, many factions struggled for power. And then again we thought our lives were over. So much killing. So many lives and homes destroyed. I have lost one uncle. I have lost four cousins. I have lost two brothers. I have lost one sister. I have lost many friends. But almost worse than the deaths are the many rapes committed against our women. Women have been used as pawns, property in this horrid fighting. I saw my mother raped. I too have been raped. This is why we welcome the Taliban, the Islamic student group that has finally brought some peace and order back to our country.

I see what the newspapers say about them. They call them right-wing, fundamentalist fanatics. They say they are oppressing the people, the women, with their insistence that we strictly adhere to the Qur'an. These Westerners do not understand. This is not oppression; it is freedom, at last. Yes, the Taliban insist that women wear the veil. They insist that women not work. But this is for our own good, for our own safety. The limit on women working is temporary, I am sure. Just until order is fully restored. Just until the fighting has stopped. If we stay at home, we are less likely to be hurt, to be raped. It is better this way, for now. Just until it is safe again for us. Let me say this clearly: There are times in every society when a government must protect its people in the way that it sees fit. For the international community to tell us that we may not force women to veil is a violation of our country's right to self-determination.

Others outside Islam so misunderstand the veil. They think it is a sign that Islamic women are slaves, are secondary, are silenced. But this is not so. The wives of Muhammed, peace be upon him, wore the veil, and they were not slaves, no! They had strong voices. Before Muhammed, peace be upon him, women were treated badly. It was through Muhammed, peace be upon him, and the Qur'an that women were finally given the protections and the rights they deserved. The veil is a signal to all who see it that the woman beneath it is a servant only of Allah and is to be respected.

It is true that the Qur'an does not require that women wear the veil, but it does require that women wear modest dress, and the men also. This is so that men and women can turn their thoughts to Allah at all times and not be distracted by the flesh. In my family, in my town, in my mosque we have always interpreted this to mean long sleeves and dresses and a head covering. But it is all a matter of culture, of interpretation. So why do I support the Taliban, who insist all women wear the veil? Because, now more than ever, our citizens must be reminded that women are to be respected. We are not property. We are not objects to be used. We are not to be hurt, raped, touched. We are sacred servants of Allah. The veil reminds all who see us of this. It also keeps us from tempting anyone, inadvertently.

But even if it were not required I would wear the veil, the *burqa*. To me it is a sacred symbol. Perhaps like wearing a cross might be to a Christian, or lighting the Shabbat candles to a Jew or setting up an altar to a Hindu or practicing meditation for the Buddhist. It is a ritual, an outward sign of an inward state. It is

not a mask or restraint. It helps me keep my thoughts on Allah. It reminds me of Allah's love and greatness. It is an act of devotion and discipline. As I feel it against my forehead or under my chin or as it grazes my cheek it reminds me of who I am. And it also tells others who I am — a strong Muslim woman.

At this moment in the history of my troubled country, I am not for "choice" in the wearing of the *burqa*. We are not merely individuals. We are servants of Allah, servants of the country, and servants of the Taliban, the saviors of the country. We must stay unified at this important moment. Every woman in my country must veil, must wear the *burqa*.

International Tribunal
on Women and the Veil: Role Play Instructions

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> *Whereas women should not celebrate or promote their oppression by veiling or covering themselves; therefore,*
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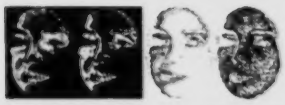
> *Be it resolved that the veil should be banned in all societies.*

Read your role carefully, decide whether or not you agree with the resolution, and modify or re-write it based on your group's perspective. Before the forum convenes, each group will have an opportunity to meet and negotiate with other groups.

In your group, complete the following in writing:

1. Restate what the veil means to you. Tell in detail what experiences you've had that have shaped your attitudes about the veil.
2. Do you agree with the resolution? Why or why not?
3. List at least four points in support of your position on the resolution.
4. Propose an alternative resolution or modify the resolution so it represents your position.



Fairuz: from Egypt

MY NAME IS FAIRUZ. I was born in and now live in Egypt. I am a respected professional with a good paying job. I went to the United States for college, but returned right after graduation. It was at that time I decided to wear the hijab. My friends from the United States do not understand my decision. Because of their American indoctrination, because of their consumer culture, they see traditional Muslim dress as a symbol of women's oppression, as a sign of backwardness and silence.

I expect that many of you feel the same way. You see me with my head covering, and you think I am just doing what some man told me to do or some male-dominated religious system forced me to do. You think I am restricted by my culture. But you are wrong. What you don't understand is that I have made this choice willingly, intelligently, consciously, and freely. I have lived in the United States. I have seen what the West has to offer. I have watched that objectified, sexualized image of women insert itself into Egyptian society through fashion and the media. And I have chosen modest dress and the hijab instead of tight skirts, plunging necklines, and dangerous high-heeled shoes.

The hijab is a symbol of personal freedom, not oppressive restriction. I can be a human being with a mind and a soul and not just a pretty little body. Bare arms; perky, bouncy breasts; and "legs that go on forever" do not indicate liberation. I have seen the oppression of women in the United States first hand. I have seen a woman beaten by her husband for talking to a male friend. I have seen young women having to sell themselves on the street because it pays better than a safe job where they can be respected. I have seen girls slash themselves because they weren't pretty enough to hang with the cool crowd. They believe they are free and do not see how their culture exploits them. Women in other cultures have gotten so much closer to real equality than they have. Why is it Pakistan has had a woman as the leader of its country but the United States has not? Americans scapegoat Muslim cultures, and most especially the modest dress of Muslim women, because they, themselves, are not free.

I am upset that "the veil" is misunderstood in so many ways. Again, we have the Western media to thank for that misunderstanding and stereotyping. First, few Muslim women cover their faces. The more common practice is to dress modestly and cover their hair. So we shouldn't even be talking about "the veil." When Western women criticize us for wearing the veil, they are showing their total ignorance of Islam. When I was in college in the United States, once someone found out I was from Egypt they would ask me where my veil was. They would act surprised to find out I was "allowed" to travel and be educated. Western women are prisoners of their own ignorance.

Women in many other cultures and religions wear scarves to cover their hair, but nobody points a finger at them. Nobody harps on the Russian women, the Hindi women, the Jewish women, or the Greek women who wear scarves. No one looks at their head-covering and says they are oppressed. When it is on these women, they see the scarf for what it is — a symbol of modesty and/or devotion. How is it that nuns in the Catholic Church totally escape the outrage directed at our similar dress? If we are going to focus on the scarf we should focus on all cultures and religions where women cover. We must then ask: In what cultural

context is the scarf worn? What do they actually symbolize? My hijab symbolizes devotion, discipline, reflection, and freedom. But nobody asks me. You just assume that I am oppressed, and with that assumption you oppress me much more than my veil does! If scarves are proof that women in Islam are oppressed, then women in other cultures who wear scarves must be oppressed too. If you can imagine that some of these women are liberated, why can't you imagine that I am?

Look, the code of modest dress is required in the Qur'an for women and men. I have never heard a Westerner say that the head covering worn by the Palestinian leader, Yassir Arafat, shows that he is oppressed. The whole concept is ridiculous. It is wrong for Westerners to selectively enforce their moral outrage. The arrogance of the West created this awful resolution. American women wouldn't have to say, "Hands off my body!" if they had the options that Muslim women have. I am a free, covered woman!

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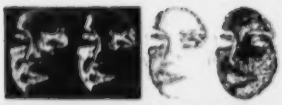

Kemi: from Turkey

MY NAME IS KEMI DAS. I am a 40 year old biology professor at Istanbul University in Turkey. Our country is on the edge of turmoil, and it is because of Islamic political extremists. I am a Muslim woman who does not cover and does not want other women to cover either. I am committed to my faith, but I am also committed to a free and progressive Turkey. Since 1924 when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk abolished the Ottoman Empire, Turkey has been a modern nation state with a government modeled on European nations. Today we are a member of NATO and an active participant in the global economy. Our relationships with other countries is stable and strong. Our people are free and equal, but that could all change if these Islamists get their way.

In 1925 Ataturk's government banned all forms of religious dress in public schools. This was necessary to promote women's rights and to free ourselves from a symbol of Ottoman authority. As a result of the ban, Turkish women today have more legal rights than any other women in the Muslim world. I would hate to give that up. But if the headscarf is not banned, my future and my daughter's future will be a dark, dark world. The headscarf is not just an innocent symbol of devotion. It is a dangerous cloak of conformity and confinement. A worldwide ban would be the beginning of the end for violent Islamic extremists. It would be the beginning of the end of women's oppression in Islam.

For Turkey to be accepted by the rest of the world as more than just a crossroads between East and West, we must remain a modern secular nation. We cannot let religious beliefs dictate our laws and our society. That is why the government renewed the ban on religious clothing in 1998 — including a ban on the headscarf for all teachers, government officials, and students in schools and universities. 99% of Turkey is Muslim but only 2% of the university population demands to wear the headscarf. Why should the majority change the law for such a small number of people?

The ban is a good idea. It quiets the influence and the propaganda of the Islamist extremists who would like to control the government — and women. In Algeria and Afghanistan, Islamic extremists have taken over the government, perverted the faith, and instituted repressive rules that deny citizens their rights — especially women. In Afghanistan, women must be covered from head to toe and cannot go to school or to work. Militant Islamists want to do the same thing here. But we have banned religious political parties in order to make sure that doesn't happen. If religious groups start running the government we would be back in the dark ages of violence and corruption and oppression. Without such a ban the world is promoting the oppression of women everywhere. The ban separates religion and government.

Do not pretend that these extremists are simply faithful Muslims who wish freedom of expression. Their goals are bigger than that, more dangerous than that. Islamists set up desks at medical school and try to recruit students with scholarships and jobs if they will wear the headscarf. They are stirring up trouble just for their own political gain. Islamists resort to threats and intimidation. I know of a woman, an Islamic scholar, who said on television that the headscarf is not required under the Qur'an. She told a friend she feared she would be killed for her statements. Two weeks later she was killed by a package bomb.

This is not just a women's issue. It is a political issue. It is a sign of political Islam. Look at Iran. Look at Saudi Arabia. Women have very few rights. They can't participate in society as our women do. Saudi women are not allowed to drive. Iranian women can't jog in public. They can't be judges. They can be killed for adultery. Is this the kind of society we want? Just this week a new member of Parliament created a lot of chaos and hostility by wearing the headscarf in the government hall. She knew the rules. But she wants to promote her religious agenda at the expense of the Turkish people. Governments must not become puppets of religion. Today it is the headscarf, tomorrow women will be stoned to death for adultery. The only way to stem the violent tide of the Islamists around the world is with a global ban on religious clothing. This is not an issue of "choice." To be Muslim is to be devoted to Allah. Women can do this without covering. I do.

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Student as Interviewer

AS OUR CURRICULUM GROUP sketched out the lessons we would include in this booklet, we received a note from Joe Bohorfoush, Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush's husband. Joe wanted to be sure that we would include a lesson that conveyed how Joan used interviewing as a way to learn about and influence the world — and as a way of building relationships across race, class, gender, nationality and age. Joe wrote:

> For Joan, her teaching and her radio documentary work were a major part of what she did to combat stereotypes and move beyond just identifying differences. She was a cultural anthropologist with an ability to quickly make friends with her subjects. She raised issues during her interviews that raised consciousness, always with friendly and encouraging questions. I think a good way to remember Joan and her contributions to education would be to teach students how to interview and possibly record these interviews.

In that spirit, the lesson below teaches students some skills of interviewing, but also encourages them to approach interviewing as a way to make a difference in the world — to simultaneously learn and teach. Here, students generate questions of their own, interview people on the subject of covering and Muslim stereotypes, and use the interviewing process to educate others on what they have learned during the previous lessons.

Materials needed:

1. Copies of the edited transcript of Abir Shaer
2. Copies of Student Handout, "Drafting Interview Questions."

Suggested Procedures:

Part One — Preparation for Interviews

In this part of the lesson students will examine an interview transcript to identify the kinds of questions that might be asked to get interviewees to tell their stories or share their opinions.

1. Distribute to students the interview with Abir Shaer. This transcript is edited, with the questions of Joan Bohorfoush, the interviewer, cut out. If you haven't done so already, talk to the class about Joan Bohorfoush, the high school teacher and radio documentarian who conducted the interview they'll read, and whose life and work inspired this curriculum guide. Also, you might tell students that English is not Abir Shaer's first language.

2. With students, review the assignment instructions on the interview handout. You might read the first couple paragraphs with the entire class, and brainstorm questions Bohorfoush may have asked to elicit

Shaer's responses. Discuss with students the difference between open-ended questions that can elicit valuable stories, information or opinions; and questions that can be answered simply "yes" or "no".

3. Encourage students to partner-up into groups of two or three.
4. After students have finished coming up with questions, review these as a class. Discuss which questions they think would be most effective and why.

Part Two—Drafting Questions:

In this part of the lesson students draft questions for their own interviews of non-covering individuals on their assumptions or perceptions about covering.

1. Review the handout, "Drafting Interview Questions," with students.
2. Have students work alone or in pairs to come up with interview questions. Encourage them to develop their own and to not just use the ones provided in the handout.

Part Three—The Interviews:

Students will conduct their own interviews: a) in order to uncover stereotypes, attitudes, perceptions and misperceptions on Islam and covering, b) in order to teach what they have learned in this unit, c) in order to gain practice in the art of questioning, and d) in order to appreciate and understand the value of personal narrative.

1. Using the questions generated in class, students (either alone or in pairs), will interview at least two people — one should be a student who has not been exposed to this curriculum and one should be an adult.
2. Students will record interviews by hand or tape.
3. Students should summarize key parts of the interview and write up the opinions and stories of each interviewee as a single edited piece. If students work in pairs, each should have a copy.
4. Students — even if they interviewed in pairs, they should do the analysis alone — should also draft a debrief or analysis of the interview experience, making sure to reflect on the following:
   - Did the questions you drafted take the interview where you hoped it would go?
   - Did you have to lead the interviewees or did they open-up easily?
   - Were you surprised by the responses you received? Why or why not?
   - Discuss at least one of the responses that you found especially interesting. What is your reaction to it?
   - Was there anything the interviewee said that made you reconsider any of your views?
   - Did you learn anything significant about the interviewee?
   - Was there anything you asked or said that you think made the interviewee reconsider any of their views? What do you feel you were able to teach in the interview?
   - Now that the interview is over, what questions do you wish you'd asked?

Part Four—The Debrief—So what did we learn?

Students will have a chance to share their interviews and analysis with others in the class. They'll have the opportunity to reflect on the value of interviewing to shed more light on this or any issue.

1. Put students into new groups of 3 or 4. Mix students up so that every student is in a group with people with whom they did not conduct interviews.

2. Provide instructions to groups:
   - Read aloud to one another the reports of your interviews.
   - Discuss some key points from your analyses.
   - Discuss and record commonalties from interviews and analyses.
   - Discuss and record how these interviews helped shed light on the issues covered in this unit.

3. Engage in a whole class discussion and debrief. If groups feel that there are particular bits of interviews that should be shared, invite those to be read to the whole group. Ask students from each group to share commonalties and insights.

Abir Shaer

Assignment:
The interview included below, conducted by Joan Bohorfoush, includes only answers. Bohorfoush's questions have been cut out. In your small group, read each answer and then decide what question may have elicited that answer. Use the space provided to write your question. Try to come up with questions that encourage story-telling. Avoid questions that can be answered "yes" or "no".

After you've finished going through the interview, write three additional questions that you think might have gotten Abir Shaer to reveal other interesting information or stories.

1. Question:

Answer:
My name's Abir Shaer. I was born in Lebanon and currently I'm in the U.S. working for my uncle at the Sahara Deli. I'm attending PCC. I'm studying to be in accounting.

2. Question:

Answer:
Lots of times when I'm out with my mother, I like going out with her to the mall and I notice lots of people staring at her because she is wearing the hijab, and some people give her the kinds of looks like — prejudiced looks by their reactions on their faces, and it bothers me a lot, and I try to ignore it. But I have a hard time ignoring it, and I tend to stare back, like, give 'em a look like, "What are you looking at?" And most of the time my mom would tell me, "Please, just ignore 'em. They just have a hard time with it. Some people are not used to seeing women wearing the hijab, so there's no need to gore yourself and get yourself upset. Just let it go." Sometimes, I have a hard time with that, but I tend sometimes to just let things go.

3. Question:

Answer:
[My mother] has always loved wanting to wear the hijab. She started wearing the hijab not very long ago. I think it's about eight years now. She just felt like it's something she wanted to do. She's very religious, loves to pray. She's very active in the Ramadan, all kinds of holidays that occur in our religion. It means a lot to her. It's a lot of respect towards my dad, and she enjoys wearing the hijab.

4. Question:

Answer:
[My mother] was surrounded by a lot of women that wore the hijab, and they're related, they're relatives, and she felt like it's something she should do. She decided it's something for her at this time, 'cause she's getting older and her kids are growing up, and she felt like it's something she felt she needed to do…she wanted to do. I think it was a sign of her own increased faith, and she wanted to do it from herself. Within herself, nobody had told her to go ahead and wear the hijab, and I think it was just she stating something to herself, in a way, not to the world.

5. Question:

Answer:
When I found out that she was going to start wearing the hijab I was very proud of her. I'm glad that she made that decision, and all her kids are proud of what her decision was. She felt good within herself because we were all for it. Even though we were all living here in the U.S. In American society some people have a hard time dealing with it. I felt it was a good statement to the world too, and not only to herself, that she's doing what she feels is right, even though she might have some prejudiced remarks or comments said to her because of that, and so I was proud of her for wanting to deal with the world and all those remarks and comments.

6. Question:

Answer:
I remember she was pregnant with my youngest brother and she decided that [she would wear the hijab]. She became very religious as she got older. I noticed that a lot about her and my father. One day, she told my dad, "I think it's time for me to wear the hijab. I feel like I need to and I want to." I'm not sure why I got her into that, but she felt like it was time for her to wear the hijab, that she wanted to do it for herself, and so, that's the time when she decided, about eight years ago.

7. Question:

Answer:
[My father] is proud of [my mother for wearing the hijab.] He is really proud of her, because it's like respect towards my dad. I hear this from a lot of married couples, that men feel like their wives are respecting them, and that she's only showing him what she has, and not to the world, and that, like, covering herself is only shown to her husband, so he respected her decision. He was proud of her. It took a lot of courage, and so he was proud of her, and her decision was an excellent one.

8. Question:

Answer:
I recall about four years ago, I was in the mall with my mother. We were just walking in the mall and shopping, and this old man with his wife passed by us and said to my mom, he goes: "This is not your country. Go back to your country. Go wear that somewhere else." That upset me really bad. My mom started telling me: "Please ignore him. Just let it go. Some people have a hard time with it." But it was really tough, and I started talking back to the guy: "Why are you saying these things? They are prejudiced remarks." The old man just walked past us and wouldn't speak to me in any way, he just kept on saying some bad remarks and cursing. I felt really bad. I felt bad for my mom and how she felt. Even though she told me: "Just let it go," I know she was hurting, because most of the times, when she's out with her sister and myself, I notice that her sister gets a lot more attention because she's not wearing the hijab. Most salespeople tend to go straight to my aunt instead of my mom because she's wearing the hijab. They'll try to ignore her. They won't help her. They'll treat her in a really rude way. When they do this, I tend to leave the mall right away and tell my mom: "Let's not get anything," and I let 'em hear it so they know they're hurting us. I've run into that quite a few times when I'm with my mom. I feel bad for her for taking that, but I'm proud of her because she's strong and she stands up for her rights.

9. Question:

Answer:
Sometimes it presents a challenge. I think people who tend to make those bad remarks feel like they will get something out of it and they'll stop it from happening, like the remark the old man said: "Go back to your country," and "Wear that somewhere else." I felt like he's trying to put my mom down and trying to force her to take it off. Many times I questioned my mom and told her: "If it's causing us so much problems, why don't you just take it off?" She said: "No. It might be causing you problems, but for me, I'm proud of it and I want to wear it, no matter what I have to deal with. It's something I want, and I won't let people stop me from doing it."

10. Question:

Answer:
Well, I'm twenty-one and I still…I haven't…I'm not covered yet, but I know in my heart that one day I will. I want to. One day, I know that I'll become as religious as my parents are, because I see them…as they got older, they got more religious, and I know that's probably gonna happen to me, and I wish it would... You feel like everything is complete and that you gotta look up to God for everything else. Thank God for everything. I see it as that. Religion is for thanking God for having good health, for being here on Earth and dealing with many beautiful people.

11. Question:

Answer:
I don't blame lots of the American people for having a problem understanding Islam. I feel that the problem is the media. It doesn't represent the truth behind Islam. Lots of movies that come out that deal with terrorism, all kinds of things that occur in the world try to show that it's Islamic people, that they're the ones behind all this. This causes hatred in lots of people's hearts, and so I don't blame the American people who have problems with it, because I know they don't know exactly what's behind the religion, the people behind the religion and the meaning.

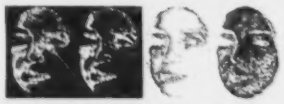
Interviewed by Joan Hawkinson Bohorfoush, April 22, 1996. Transcribed by Lee Eisenberg. The interview was edited and Bohorfoush's questions removed for the purposes of this lesson; some short answers were combined into one response.

Additional Questions:
Write three more questions that you think might have encouraged Abir Shaer to offer interesting information or stories.

1.

2.

3.



Drafting Interview Questions

YOU WILL BE CONDUCTING your own interviews about people's attitudes on Islamic women who cover. These will be an opportunity for you to learn more about people's ideas, but also to offer them information that may get them to rethink those ideas.

Assignment:

1. Come up at least ten questions that relate to veiling, Islam, and stereotypes.

- At least one of your questions should involve one of the photos that the class looked at in the first lesson. (For example, you might show the photo to someone you are interviewing and ask him or her: "Why do you think this woman wears a head covering?")
- At least one of your questions must be designed to share information or understandings that you've gained from the lessons we've done on Islamic women and the veil. The goal here is to educate your interviewee and to get his or her thoughts on what you've learned. (Example: "In the United States some women have been denied employment because they wear the hijab, a head covering. Why do you think that happens?")
- At least one of your questions must be designed to elicit information about your interviewee's cultural assumptions. (Example: "When you see a woman who wears a veil or hijab, what are the first thoughts that cross your mind?")

In coming up with your questions, be sure to anticipate and include follow-up questions that will get at a deeper understanding of the interviewee's thinking. (Example: If in your interview you ask, "Why do you think some women veil?" and the interviewee responds, "Religion," what should you ask next in order to get the person to more fully discuss their assumptions?)

Further Resources

INTERVIEW

Davies, LB: **Interview with Joan Bohorfoush** in *Glimmer Train,* Fall 1997, Issue 24, pp. 129-155.

This is Joanie in her own words. The interview was conducted just two months before she died of ovarian cancer. She was reluctant to do the interview for fear that it would be taken as her final statement. But Joanie always had the gift of gab and it comes through in her interview. She tells stories with humor, love and understanding about her family, friends, activism and work. The reader will learn about her evangelical Christian upbringing, and her turn toward social activism in her early twenties. Joanie talks about salmon fishing in Alaska, waiting tables in Seattle, and working as a secretary in Portland — some of the many jobs she held before she became a high school teacher. The interview also focuses on the challenges she faced as a global studies teacher in a suburban public school. Joanie tells the story of how she was fired for what appeared to be political reasons, and the community mobilized on her behalf in challenging the decision before the school board. Joanie also reflects on her experiences doing radio documentary work in immigrant communities, and the challenges in working across cultural boundaries. The interview is a slice of Joanie's rich life.

CURRICULUM MATERIALS

Shabbas, A. ed.: **Arab World Studies Notebook,** Arab World and Islamic Resources and School Services and Middle East Policy Council, 1998.

This resource guide includes over 500 pages of materials on Islam and Arab culture. Each chapter includes lesson plans for middle and high school students relating to such subjects as the Qur'an, women, colonialism, oil, Palestine and Arabs in America. Chapters also include lesson plans, readings, annotated film, video and book recommendations. The book provides a list of English words rooted in Arabic, a comparison of Eastern and Western music, Arabic folk tales and a list of famous Arabs. It also includes simple recipes for Middle Eastern food and instructions for making tent panels. (See website/address info. below.)

Reese, L. **Women of the Muslim World: Personalities and Perspectives from the Past.** Women in World History Curriculum. 1998.

The curriculum arranges the lives of twenty-one women around topics such as the Hajj, political and religious leadership, jihad, commerce, the veil, and popular culture. Includes first-person narratives, poems, songs, photos, and explanatory notes. Readings date from the 8th century to the present. (Available from AWAIR — see below.)

BOOKS

Badr, L: **A Balcony Over the Fakihani.** Interlink Books, New York 1993.

Based on three novellas, this work of fiction tells the stories of three different Palestinian families who are forced to move from Palestine in 1948, from Jordan in 1970, and then to live in exile in Beirut. Along the way, the narrators describe the Shatilla refugee camp, the Phalangists, Black September, the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, and the hostilities Palestinians encountered in their diaspora throughout the Middle East.

Esposito, J: **Islam. The Straight Path.** Oxford University Press, New York 1988.

This text is an introduction to Islam and the Muslim world. It begins with the 7th century historical context in which Muhammad lived and received his 'call' to become the Prophet of God. It explains the Qur'an, or word of God, and the five pillars of Islam, the guiding principles of daily life. It describes Muslim communities throughout history, including factions such as the Druze and Sufis. The book emphasizes Islam as a way of life, as well as a set of religious beliefs.

Harik, R.M. and Elsa Marston: **Women in the Middle East.** Franklin Watts, 1996. 224 pp.

The authors have long lived in the Middle East. This is an overview of life today, written especially for young audiences.

Mernissi, F: **Dreams of Trespass.** Addison-Wellesley Publishing Company, 1994.

This is the autobiographical story of Muslim feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi's life in a Moroccan harem between the ages of five and ten. While the lives of women are restricted in terms of what they can do and where they can go, the isolated world of the harem also creates powerful, fulfilling bonds among women. Mernissi describes with fondness her memories of visiting the bath houses with her mother, aunts, grandmother and women of the community, having henna hair treatments, and other women-only events. Yet these women are outside the realm of power and decision-making, which is why they have dreams of trespass into the outside world.

Mernissi, F: **The Forgotten Queens of Islam.** University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993.

This scholarly work was researched and written by Mernissi to counter the notion espoused by Islamic fundamentalists that no women had ever held positions of power in Muslim countries and that to do so is blasphemous. She identifies and explores the reigns of fifteen queens, such as the Queen of Sheba, whose history, accomplishments and failures have been 'forgotten' in patriarchal accounts of Islamic history. She looks at how the queens gained power, either through inheritance or military might, and how these women governed once in power. Mernissi also discusses the sexual alliances of these queens, and how their unions with men sometimes cost them their thrones, or even their lives. Mernissi presents a review and analysis of this history in light of the movement within contemporary Islamic politics to exclude women.

Mernissi, F. **The Veil and the Male Elite.** Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA, 1991.

In her history of Islam, Mernissi examines the question of whether the Muslim faith is incompatible with gender equality. The book focuses on the early years of Islam and Muhammed's intention of creating an egalitarian society that was free of slavery or sexual domination of women by men. The author argues

that it is the political and economic interests of the male elite, rather than Islamic principles, that dictates female exclusion from public life. Further, she suggests that Islam is open to multiple interpretations and is increasingly interpreted by women in ways consistent with feminist principles of gender equality.

Wadud, A: **Qur'an and Woman.** Oxford University Press, 1999.

An analysis of the concept of woman drawn directly from the Qur'an — everything else is just "what some Muslims do." Here is what Islam says. The tendency in the West has been to confuse the actions of some Muslims with the teachings of Islam. Wadud (Religious Studies, Virginian Commonwealth University) argues that it is not the text which restricts women, but interpretations of the text which some have held in greater importance than the text itself.

FILMS

A Veiled Revolution (1982). Directed by Elizabeth Fernea. First Run/Icarus, distributor. 27 minutes

This documentary tells the story of young Egyptian women challenging Islamic law and societal constraints on women, even as many of them are resuming the cultural practice of wearing the veil. The history of Egyptian feminism is introduced to dramatize the shifting meanings of the Islamic principle of "modest dress" over time. While an earlier generation of women cast off the veil as a symbol of oppression, many contemporary young women are resuming the practice as an assertion of their Islamic identity and as resistance to the Western fashion industry. Through close-up shots of women discussing Islamic law, the film also explores political differences between those women who wear only the head scarf and those who completely cover. These distinctions in the practice of veiling suggest differing responses of women to a changing society, and particularly to the entry of women into the world of paid work.

The film works well as part of the *Scarves of Many Colors* curriculum. It encourages critical thinking about the differing cultural and political meanings of the veil, and it includes engaging stories of young women struggling with social change and emerging possibilities for female identity. The title of the documentary also may serve as a focal point for discussion: What does a "veiled revolution" suggest?

The Battle of Algiers (1966). Directed by Gillo Pontecorvo. 2 hrs 5 min., B&W, in Arabic/French, subtitled in English.

With the realism of a documentary, this film dramatizes the Algerian resistance to the French colonial government during the 1950s. Without glorifying the national independence movement, the film casts this early anti-colonial struggle as a heroic fight against European domination. Women are portrayed as a vital part of the independence movement, even though the leadership is shown to be male. Women are engaged in protest, and most of them are veiled. One critical scene in the film shows a young woman refusing to be searched by a police officer, appealing to his respect for her modesty. The film then cuts to a scene of the woman bringing a weapon out from under her billowy skirts and passing it furtively to a comrade. Later scenes show women donning Western dress to pass as non-Muslim, once again as a strategy of resistance.

The grainy feel and the sub-titles may be alien to young audiences, but selected scenes from the film could be effectively used in the classroom to challenge stereotypes of covered women as passive. Without some introduction to the French-Algerian war, however, the film could be confusing, or could reinforce stereotypes of Arabs as prone to "terrorism."

ORGANIZATIONS/WEBSITES

AWAIR: Arab World and Islamic Resources — www.telegraphave.com/gui/awairproductinfo.html; 2137 Rose St., Berkeley, CA 94709 (510-704-0517 phone/fax).

Valuable teaching resources on the Arab world and Islamic issues, including some of those listed above; also offers workshops for school districts.

Karamah: Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights — www.karamah.org.

Karamah (which means dignity in Arabic) is an educational organization which focuses on the domestic and global human rights issues of Muslim women. The site includes news affecting the legal rights of Muslim women.

Muslim Women's League — www.mwlusa.org.

A non-profit Muslim organization working to implement the values of Islam to promote the status of women as free, equal, and vital contributors to society. It addresses gender rights issues for Muslim women all over the world.

NISAA: An Arab Women's Web Site — www.nisaa.org.

NISAA is a regional project of the Arab Women's Forum. It focuses on gender-specific topics such as violence against women, but is limited to Muslim countries in the Middle East.

Rethinking Schools — www.rethinkingschools.org; also 800-669-4192.

A quarterly publication and publisher of educational materials from a social justice perspective. Includes innovative teaching ideas, analyses of key policy issues, and listings of valuable classroom resources.

Sisterhood is Global Institute — www.sigi.org.

Established in 1984 by an international cross-section of women activists, SIGI is a feminist think-tank. With members in over 70 countries, it seeks to deepen understanding of women's rights, freedoms, and power. While not specifically focusing on Muslim women, this site addresses issues of gender equality that affect Muslim and non-Muslim women.

Teaching for Change — www.teachingforchange.org; also 800-763-9131.

The best resource for multicultural, social justice teaching materials. The entire "Teaching for Change" catalog is on their website.

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